

A NOTE ON MAHACINATARA

The goddess Tara or Prajnadevi is worshipped both by the Hindus and the Budhists. In Buddhism, deification of Prajnaparamita into the goddess Tara is not at all unusual, but the inclusion of a non-Vedic goddess into the Hindu pantheon indicates apparently partial absorption of Buddhism into Hinduism in the early medieval period. The Hindu authors have tried to explain, how the worship of the non-Vedic goddess Tara came into vogue among the Hindu Tantrics. The explanation is found in the तारातन्त्रम् (Rajshahi, 1913) : रुद्रयामलतन्त्रम् (Ch. XVII), ब्रह्मयामल तन्त्रम् (Ch. I-II), and महाचीनाचारक्रम. The tradition preserved in these texts is as follows :

Ascetic-sage Vasistha took the necessary instructions from his spiritual preceptor Brahma for visualization of the goddess Tara, but he failed to visualize the goddess, inspite of his long and arduous attempts through severe austerities and deep meditations in the Himalayas. He made another attempt on a sea-coast, probably in Assam and he could not succeed this time also. In disgust he began to curse the goddess Tara, when the goddess condescended to appear before him and advised him to go to Mahacina, where he would find Buddha, an incarnation of Visnu ; it is from him, that he would obtain the necessary instructions. Sage, Vaisistha then proceeded to Mahacina and found there his right spiritual preceptor, Buddha. Evidently this Buddha, referred to in late texts of the medieval period cannot be the founder of Buddhism, but very probably a Buddhist saint like Bodhidharma, who became famous in China in the 6th Century A. D. as a pastmaster in esoteric practices. The conversation that sage Vasistha had with the so-called Buddha is given in these words in the रुद्रयामल-तन्त्रम् (Ch. XVII बुद्धवशिष्ठवृत्तान्त) :

वशिष्ठः । कथंवा जायते सिद्धिर्वेदकार्यं किंवा प्रभो ।
बुद्ध उवाच । वशिष्ठ ! शृणु कक्ष्यामि कुलमार्गमनुत्तमम् ।
येन विज्ञानमन्त्रेण रुद्ररूपी भवेत् क्षणात् ।

एकाकी निर्जने स्थितः कामक्रोधादिरहितः ॥
सदा योगाभ्यासरतो योगशिक्षाध्वजः ॥

[Vasistha asked Buddha how can a person attain perfection without recourse to Vedic rituals.

In reply Buddha said, O Vasistha listen, there is the excellent path of the Kaulas (a Tantric system), by knowing which a person becomes in a moment a god with a frightening look.]

[A person should stay in a lonely place and get rid of desires and anger, and practise meditations without a break and remain always firm in accumulating experiences of meditations.]

The above tradition evidently has no historical basis but it has been invented to explain the importance of the *Taratantram* as also to offer an explanation for incorporating a non-Vedic goddess into the Hindu pantheon. This will be apparent from the stanzas quoted below from the *Taratantram*, in which Siva explains to Parvati how the *Taratantram* was learnt by Buddha and sage Vasistha and what benefits they derived from the same.

भैरव उवाच ।
स एव परमो देवी बुद्धरूपी जनार्दनः ।
उग्रतारा मरुमन्त्रं पञ्चार्णं (?) परिजप्य च ।
सृष्ट्यादिकर्मकर्ता च अजरामरतां ययौ ।
वशिष्ठो ह्यप्येनमारुध्य नक्षत्रलोकमागतः ॥

[He is the greatest god, Visnu (Janardana) in the form of Buddha. By meditation and repetition of Ugrataramahamantra, he became the Lord, the Creator of the Universe and attained immortality. Vasistha also by invoking her (through her mantra) was reborn in the sphere of stars]

In his *Indian Buddhist Iconography* (pp. 189-190) Dr. B. Bhattacharyya has referred to the Buddhist and Hindu conceptions of the image of Mahacinatara, that is, Ugra-Tara as given in the *Sadhanamala* and the *Tantrasara* of Krishnananda Agamavagisa of the 16th Century. He points out how the Buddhist conception was modified by the Hindu Tantrics.

In a few hymns invoking Tara and particularly in the hymn of *Tarahasya* it is clearly indicated that Tara was identical with Prajnaparamita and this was recognized by the Hindus and the Buddhists alike.

The Hindu Tantras may have borrowed a few gods and goddesses from the Buddhists but their ways and methods of practices were different from those of the Buddhists. The propounder of the Hindu Tantras was invariably Siva, who is referred to in these texts as Bhairava. Likewise the interlocutor was always Parvati or Sakti who is referred to as Bhairavi. Hence the Hindu Tantras owe their origin solely to Bhairava and Bhairavi. In later days there appeared a number of authors and saints, to whom also is attributed the authorship of many Hindu Tantric texts,

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